



UPDATE

School Readiness

Early Reading Success

The Connecticut Commission on Children Vol. 4 No. 1 April, 2002

School Readiness Is One Smart Little Investment

Current research, from both Connecticut and the nation, unerringly supports the investment in quality preschool.

In Middletown, School Readiness Bridges the Achievement Gap

The availability of a school readiness program accounted for a significant increase in the number of low-income African-American children "ready" for school – from 87.1 percent (of those who did not attend) to 96.0 percent (of those who did attend). Among white children in general, 96.97 percent were prepared for school.

Low-income African-American children who attended a school readiness program attained an average school readiness score (55.63) that was comparable to white children in general (57.59) and surpassed both white low-income children (51.16) and those low-income African-American children who did not attend a school readiness program (48.37).

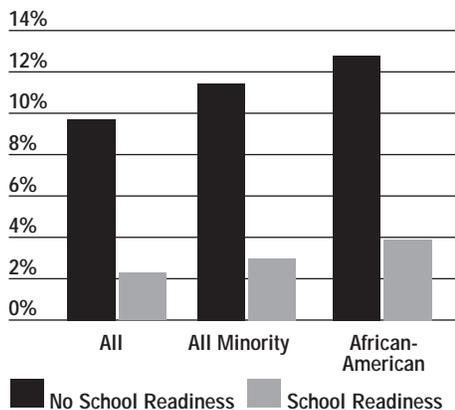
These findings provide strong evidence that school readiness programs can help to close the educational gap at kindergarten entry between white and low-income African-American children. The study, conducted in Middletown, Connecticut, used the results of the DIAL-3 developmental screening test to find those at risk of school difficulties in kindergarten.

Among Middletown children enrolled in kindergarten, 46 percent of African-Americans and 50 percent of Latino children participated in a school readiness program, as opposed to 31 percent of white children. The study also found that children – across racial and economic lines – who attended two years of pre-K, were significantly better prepared for kindergarten than those who attended only one year.

The Middletown findings, conducted by Walter Gilliam of Yale University, are consistent with an earlier analysis of all state-funded school readiness programs in the nation. That study, conducted by Edward Zigler and Walter Gilliam, found



School Readiness Reduces Percentage of Children Scoring Below Threshold on DIAL-3 (-1.5 SD)

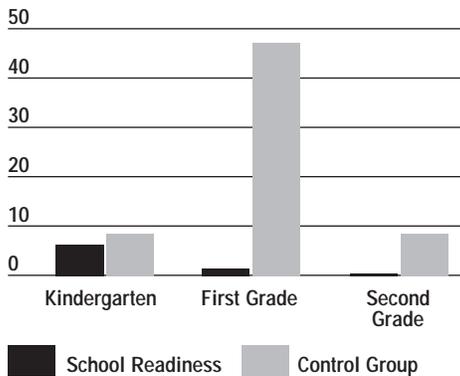


that pre-K programs had a significant impact in increased competence, reduction in behavior problems by 4th grade, improved attendance and grades in elementary school, and improved state achievement scores. In addition, every state that looked at the impact of their program on grade retention found a significant impact.

Bridgeport Study Shows Sweeping Outcomes

A recent Bridgeport study shows parents want quality care with well-trained providers for these critical times in a child's early development. The majority do not seek out informal care as a matter of choice. The study states that seventy percent of the parents said they would choose licensed child care when given the choice. The critical shortage of quality care, particularly for infants and toddlers, as well as the cost of care pushes many parents to choose unlicensed care because they have no real choice.

Retentions – Percentages



- In Kindergarten, 11/197 School readiness children were retained (as compared to 15/176).
- In First Grade, 1/88 School Readiness children were retained (as compared to 49/96).
- In Second Grade, 0/13 School Readiness children were retained (as compared to 2/23).

control group (who did not have preschool), the findings are striking:

Less Retention

Children who had no preschool had 62 retentions in grades K, 1 or 2 (21 percent) while those with preschool had only 12 (4 percent) In the first grade, only one school readiness child was retained; 45 children who did not have preschool were retained.

Better Attendance

The average number of days absent for the readiness group was significantly lower in both kindergarten and first grade than the control group. Kindergarten students who had preschool had an average of 9.76 days absent, compared with 15.65 days for those who did not attend preschool.

In Bridgeport alone, 2,300 children are being cared for in unlicensed, unregulated care.

In early 2002, Bridgeport released updated outcome data for children who had been in preschool against those that had not. The study will follow these two groups through fourth grade.

With 298 children who attended preschool and 295 children in a

Better Reading Behaviors

Observable reading behavior scores were much higher for school readiness children than for the control group. The average score on the Developmental Reading Assessment at the first grade level for those with preschool experience was 11.68. Those who had not attended preschool averaged just 6.84, well below the state's "substantially deficient" level of 10. All school readiness students exceeded the "substantially deficient" level.

Better Reading Scores

The school readiness cohort scored higher in reading readiness than the control group.

Tax Savings

School readiness saves significant tax dollars in decreased retention. Retentions in K-2 cost \$622,644 for the control group and \$113,208 for the school readiness children who were observed.

"Evidence is now clear that a pre-kindergarten education experience improves school readiness. However, what is less known is that the degree of improvement is related to the quality of the preschool experience. Thus, we must continue to upgrade quality in all our preschool settings. This includes child care."

*Dr. Edward Zigler,
Bush Center,
Yale University*

"Five years ago, Connecticut launched a comprehensive school readiness program. I'm convinced this is making a difference and should be expanded to be available for all our children."

*Representative
Cameron C. Staples,
Co-Chair, Education
Committee*





kindergarten year.

Less Retention

Children who did not attend the high quality preschool program were over four times more likely to be retained at the end of their kindergarten year. This is compelling as some argue that the gains in early care and education do not hold for middle class children. This showed that they did.

Cost Savings

There were also significant cost savings resulting from the greatly reduced number of children requiring outside special education

placements in later years. The town found savings of \$4,128,000 in a four-year period.

Milford Outcomes Include Cost-Savings

Milford, Connecticut found that children who attended a high-quality preschool program were significantly more school ready upon entry to kindergarten and more successful in school than children who did not attend the high-quality program. Children in the longitudinal study were from primarily white, middle-income backgrounds and had been previously identified as being at high risk for educational failure due to their below average scores on a developmental assessment of cognitive, language, and motor skills.

At-Risk Learners Succeed in School

Children in the high-quality preschool program gained an average of four points (95.0 to 99.0) on age appropriate tests in language, motor skills and concept development over the course of the preschool program. In contrast, children who did not attend a high-quality program (half of whom were in center-based care) lost developmental ground, experiencing a decline in average test scores (92.6 to 91.5) over the same period.

Less Special Services

Two thirds of the students who completed the preschool program required no special services when they were in kindergarten, grade one or two.

Less Special Education

Preschool participants were three times less likely to require special education during their

Families Struggle to Balance Work and Child Care Under New Federal Welfare Law

As Connecticut mothers with young children move from welfare to work, many encounter enormous challenges in finding child care, putting food on the table, balancing work and family, and coping with mental health problems, according to a recent study. Wages were low, job turnover rates were high, and work hours were irregular for working mothers in the Connecticut sample, which included mothers in the Jobs First and AFDC programs.

Wave 2 of the Growing Up in Poverty Study, conducted by Sharon Lynn Kagan (Teachers College, Columbia & Yale Universities), Jude Carroll (Yale University) Bruce Fuller (University of California, Berkeley) and Susanna Loeb (Stanford University), surveyed single mothers and their young children primarily between 1998 and 2000. The report is available at (www.tc.edu/new-lives/ .)

According to the study:

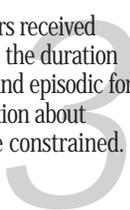
- Four years after program entry, the incidence of mothers working was greater under the Jobs First Program (69 percent) than under the former AFDC program (58 percent).

- The total annual income for all mothers was between \$14,000 and \$15,000.
- The impact of very low earnings can be seen in the financial problems experienced by many mothers. The average mother reported a total of \$425 in savings and \$4,700 in accumulated debts.
- Irregular work hours directly influence the time mothers can be with their children. Many women worked early evening shifts (44 percent), late night shifts (14 percent) or other irregular shifts.
- The average mother reported that she held between two and three different jobs in the prior year, which can have important implications for child care. When jobs are lost or changed, mothers lose their child care subsidy.
- Mothers moved their family an average of 2.3 times in the prior year alone, but they reported on average that their new neighborhood or housing situation was no better than before.
- Nearly half of Jobs First mothers displayed significant symptoms of emotional depression, and those who were unemployed displayed even higher levels of depression.

“You made the first strategic change in public education in over 50 years. Connecticut said that preschool education is an important part of the public education system - that is the first strategic change. We need to make sure that it continues to work by adequately funding the implementation of that wonderful strategy.”

David EA Carson, Retired Chair, People's Bank

- One in eight mothers visited food banks and soup kitchens to feed their children. One in five said they lived in a housing unit infested with roaches or other pests.
- One-fourth (26 percent) of Jobs First mothers had to cut the size of meals at home “because they could not afford more food,” compared with 14 percent of AFDC mothers.
- Only one-third (33 percent) of the four year-olds could write their name correctly, and 29 percent could count out loud to 20. The average mother read to her young child once or twice a week.
- Children in the study spent an average of 34 hours per week in child care. A rising share of children was enrolled in center-based programs.
- Almost three in five working mothers received public subsidies for child care. But the duration of this assistance remained short and episodic for many women. The flow of information about child care options remained quite constrained.



Health, School Readiness and Learning

If a child fails in health, many days are lost in schooling. If the child is sick, the mother is not at work. If a child is ill for a long time, the mother often quits her job.

In Connecticut, as in the nation, not enough low-income families are utilizing the health care they are eligible for. Connecticut is not approaching the 80 percent mark the federal government requires for targeted early health screening. We are closer to only a 40 percent mark for those eligible through a comprehensive Medicaid system called EPSDT.

Connecticut sought a significant infusion of health care referrals in our school readiness system.

If the new managed care system was not reaching enough eligible families for EPSDT screens, perhaps the early care and education provider could become the health care broker.

In the first run of data on our school readiness programs, approximately 97 percent of the children were covered by health care.

The school readiness program has become a linkage to health care that offers one remedy to the health care utilization gap facing this nation.

Connecticut has been the only state to have health consultants in infant and toddler programs. We have now required that our preschool programs help children be linked to medical coverage and medical homes.

Kindergarten Focus Groups

The kindergarten teacher is the bridge between systems of care - early care giving and formal education. Kindergarten teachers define readiness to include motor skills, capacity to share, curiosity, motivation, language skills and respect for adults.

The kindergarten teachers in a Fairfield County focus group, report youngsters with decreasing small motor skill levels, declining social con-

tract values and more aggression. They report having trouble keeping up with the students because they are attending school with inadequate preparation for formal schooling.

Many teachers found that children had meager awareness of books, had not been read to, and did not know how to hold a book or writing utensil. Many children had no books at home. Children's hands and fingers were not used as frequently as would be important for physical mastery of objects and eye-hand coordination. (Some teachers conjectured that the decline in small motor skills was coming from television use. The old days of playing with crayons and small scissors was giving way to staring at constantly changing electronic stimuli).

One teacher from a blue-collar community described a nutrition curriculum that excited her. She planned meal preparation, coloring and special dinners. She could not proceed. Not enough children knew what a meal was. Many did not know how to sit at a table.



Training

The National Child Care Quality and Children's Outcomes Study took place in Connecticut. This study followed children from three years old through the early elementary years. The quality of the early care experience affected the children's language, math and reading, as well as social skills.

Children who were in good quality preschool settings had better language, academic and social skills each year over a three-year period. Language and math skills related more to classroom practices. Social skills connected more to the closeness of the teacher child relationship.

From this study it became eminently clear that the training of providers was paramount. Connecticut seeks to train workers to improve the skills of those at home, in family day care and in center based care.

Given that most providers were in a system with no career ladder, Connecticut created a career ladder attaching points to courses and experience, then created a system that allowed classes to be bundled to be equivalent to course units for college or junior college.

Connecticut now has a system in place, called Charts-A-Course which approves trainers, covers an integrated curriculum, assesses individual's coursework, provides scholarships, develops articulation plans for college credit and helps programs gain accreditation. Providers are trained in health, growth and development, children's language development, transition from child care to kindergarten and understanding developmental delays.

Many parents were selecting poor care because they could not find a trained provider from their race or culture. Through this Charts-A-Course training, the diversity of teachers is broader, 30 percent are African American, Hispanic and Asian. 27 percent are licensed family day care providers, 33 percent center based and 10 percent relatives. The state has trained more than 4,000 providers.

Participants, when evaluated, are inspecting now for safety hazards, supervising children as closely as their ages require, preparing more nutritious meals, encouraging hand washing, reading to children and offering more choices to children and more leadership to parents as partners and consumers.



increased from 87 to 98 percent.

- The proportion of centers offering financial assistance to pursue a recognized early childhood credential increased dramatically – from 55 to 79 percent – over the same period.
- A higher percentage of parents were invited to attend parenting meetings in the second year (85 percent vs. 77 percent in the first year) and, of those invited, a higher percentage of parents attended (also 85 percent vs. 77 percent).

The educational qualifications of center directors and primary classroom teachers also improved

- The proportion of directors with graduate or professional degrees improved from 27 percent to 46 percent.
- Primary teachers in 1999-2000 were much more likely to have 4-year college degrees or higher (42 percent) than were teachers in 1998-1999 (29 percent).

High Staff Turnover

- Staff turnover, which averaged 47 percent, continues to be a major challenge to quality improvement.
- Inadequate wages, director turnover (every 3 1/2 years on average) and the need for more training were identified as significant issues.

“Preschool education is an asset that has proved its worth. Legislators should make every effort to preserve, and eventually expand, this worthwhile initiative.”

“School Readiness works” The Hartford Courant editorial, March 14, 2002

Connecticut School Readiness Program Shows Improvement

The Connecticut school readiness program demonstrated improvement in child outcomes, center quality and staff qualifications from 1998 to 2000, according to a preliminary evaluation prepared for the State of Connecticut by James T. Bond of the Families and Work Institute.

Children enrolled in the pre-K program in 1999-2000 demonstrated improved outcomes when compared with those who started a year earlier. They engaged in more complex interactions with peers and more complex play with objects, and they were less often inactive and not engaged with people. In other research, Bond noted, “This pattern of findings is associated with more positive development and learning.”

Center quality improved from 1998-99 to 1999-2000

- The proportion of centers offering training during non-work hours that is free to staff



Early Integration Is Critical to Unite Children Across Race

Young children in a carefully integrated school environment manifest more comfort and joy in diversity. As a result, early integration may lead to reduced fear and mistrust across racial lines, according to various research studies summarized by Anthony Raden of Yale University's Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy.

The potential benefits of early integration may be significant. Exposing young children to multiracial peers can help reduce the likelihood of later ridicule or fear of other races. (Hopson & Hopson, 1993). "[T]he effects of cooperative



learning on intergroup relations are strong and long lasting . . ." (Slavin, 1995). Providing children with the opportunity to develop positive relationships with members of other racial groups may help "transcend some of the structural barriers that affect interracial and interethnic contact . . ." (Coll & Garcia, 1995).

For classroom integration to produce positive benefits, it must begin early in the earliest grades. Since friendships "have already begun to develop during the preschool years, this is an important developmental period in which to start structuring these interventions." (Coll & Garcia, 1995). "[B]y the late preschool years children come to . . . evaluate [people] on the basis of racial-category membership." (Hirschfeld, 1996). "Racial attitudes are acquired early and become harder to change . . . as the child matures." (McConhay, 1981).

Simply integrating a classroom is not enough. It is important to bring together children of different races and the same economic background in order to provide equal-status contact and less likelihood of mistrust, fear or violence. (Hopson & Hopson, 1993). Having a large enough percentage of each race present in each desegregated school is important in order to have equal power and status inside the school. (McConhay, 1981). Interaction should be cooperative, involve one-on-one situations and receive institutional support. (Devine, in press).

Prevent Aggressive Behavior

Preschool can help assess and intervene with children who manifest aggressive behavior. During the 1999 – 2000 school year, there were 511 disciplinary offenses recorded for kindergarteners. Most offenses involved infractions such as disobedience, disrespect and profanity. However, violence-related offenses involved: hitting, kicking, biting, throwing objects at teacher/students and fighting.

Aggressive and violent behavior is learned and preventable.

Critical factors, which help to protect children from becoming involved with violence, include:

- Beginning as early as possible with prevention/intervention. The younger a child is when efforts to prevent aggressive attitudes and behaviors begin, the greater is the potential for success,
- Addressing aggression early and specifically as part of a wider range of anti-social behaviors, and
- Reinforcing prevention/early intervention across a weave of family, school, friends, and community. Such 'whole school models' in early care and education and elementary schools reflect a full culture change rather than a single intervention.



Financing School Readiness

State investment in school readiness demonstrates innovative use of federal and state dollars. Federal dollars from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) are used to finance school readiness programs in addition to general fund dollars. Serving more than 6,000 children, the State Department of Education estimates an additional 14,731 three- and four-year-olds could benefit from the program. Given the economic downturn, projected dollars for school readiness remain constant at the 2000-01 level of funding.

Of concern, at this time, is the proposed cut to the Child Care Assistance Program, newly named Care4Kids. The program serves families on TANF and also provides subsidies for low-income working families up to 50 percent of the poverty level.



As of July 1, 2002, the budget limits the program to TANF recipients and children currently enrolled. Currently Care4Kids has provided financial assistance for 4,486 children enrolled in school readiness programs. Only 20 percent, or 917, are actually on TANF. Cuts to this program for non-TANF families will greatly limit the number of non-TANF children able to attend school readiness programs.



Linking Early Childhood to Economic Development

With the State expansion of school readiness, we created a variety of financing strategies for facilities expansion. Through the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority's (CHEFA) financing programs, we have leveraged a combination of State debt service appropriations and guarantees, together with CHEFA funds, funds provided by seven major banks and contributed funds to

finance the purchase, construction and renovation of child care facilities. We have loaned \$47.6 million to 26 child care providers to develop facilities that will provide care to more than 3,700 children, including 1,500 new child care slots. These facilities have led to an increase in infant care as well as preschool children, the training of informal care providers, stricter requirements for program accreditation, and collaboration with other providers for health, nutrition and family services.

Connecticut's innovative facilities financing program has been very successful, so successful that we have utilized virtually all the available funding. We need additional funding to continue to meet the needs of more than 14,000 children statewide. Hopefully, funding for these innovative financing strategies will be restored during the 2002 legislative session.

Growth Needs Continue

At the onset of the state's school readiness plan, virtually 50 – 60 percent of children in the larger cities and rural sector were without any quality preschool choice. Today, we have reduced this gap to 30 – 40 percent. Yet, according to the Commissioner of Education, there are 15,000 children still needing preschool in the priority school districts alone.

The country pronounced through its National Education Goals that every child would be ready for school by the year 2000. As we enter 2002, there are still thousands of children waiting for quality preschool.

This past year the state was level funded in readiness. Yet the growth need is evident. Transitional school districts are waiting for their turn in school readiness.

They have significant need and do not want to see a model program only in priority school districts. In our priority school districts, we have made a large dent, but there are approximately 40 percent of children still without choice. The spaces are taken or the program is not affordable for them.

“Connecticut really stood out in our 50-state look at early childhood education, by establishing pre-K standards, requiring accreditation for pre-K programs, and making part of your law that those standards need to be adhered to . . .”

*Kathryn Doherty,
Education Week*

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National Praise as Best Model for School Readiness Legislation

The Wharton School of Business highlighted the Connecticut model this fall in a national conference of business leaders and early care experts. Connecticut has shown an understanding of growth in its facilities expansion and partnership with the business sector. The state is touted for its CHEFA/Graustein Memorial Fund/LISC partnership in renovation and relocation to help move children out of unsafe basements into more appropriate space for learning. Our loan funds from banks as well as the CHEFA opportunity are being replicated in other states.

Connecticut Wins Major Grant to Develop School Readiness Indicators

The School Readiness Indicators Project is a multi-state initiative funded by the Packard, Kaufman and Ford Foundations to help monitor broad trends to develop a system of measurable indicators of child well-being birth through age eight.

The project will establish a task force of policy-makers, advocates, families and service

providers to assist the process. The Commission on Children will serve on the task force. DSS and the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut. (CHDI) partnership will build the infrastructure for early childhood research and data analysis in Connecticut.

Keeping School Readiness on Track in Connecticut

Connecticut established its baseline. We will follow these children longitudinally with readiness benchmarks. We are already seeing a high correlation of classroom gains based on teacher training and NAEYC accreditation. We are also seeing:

- Extensive health care referrals;
- Improved school attendance;
- Teacher descriptions of better-prepared kindergartners;
- Improved health status of kindergarten children;
- Decreased numbers of children requiring special education;
- Children showing more interaction, more awareness of books;

“A child’s readiness for school is a direct factor in determining how a child will perform in school. School readiness is one piece of the education puzzle that both sides of the aisle and educators agree is absolutely critical to that child’s ultimate success in school.”

Senator
Thomas J. Herlihy

- Cost savings in reduced special education and outplacement dollars;
- More parents involved;
- Cities involved and more aware of children’s policy;
- Business leading and partnering in funds;
- Librarians training teachers and bringing in books;
- More participation from higher institutions of learning.

There are unmet preschool needs well beyond the sectors we are in. What was once just a story of lunchbox and sneakers is now a story of opportunity or loss that precedes the opening of the kindergarten door.

Connecticut is already seeing that a statewide investment in quality preschool will offer tallied gains to be mapped longitudinally over the next decade.

There is a major investment in Connecticut in broad, continuous systems reform for young children’s learning.

The school readiness and early reading success legislation have the potential to increase our learning capabilities, to decrease school failure and to save the public both dollars and dignity.



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